Amendments to the Claims

The listing of claims below is intended to replace all prior listings of the claims in the present application.

1. (currently amended) A feeder chute consisting essentially ~~seesentially~~ of:

a bottom member having a first end which defines a receiving zone and a second end which defines a discharge zone;

a plurality of channels formed in the bottom member within the discharge zone and extending in the direction between the first and second ends, wherein one of the plurality of channels has a terminus defining a first discharge plane and a second channel adjacent to the one channel has a terminus defining a second discharge plane, the second discharge plane being spaced apart from the first discharge plane;

wherein the terminus of each channel is free from any encumbrance.

2. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 2, wherein the bottom member includes a portion between the first and second ends which defines an alignment zone, the feeder chute further comprising:

means for aligning an object traveling through the alignment zone, the means for aligning causing the object to be aligned with its length axis extending substantially in a direction between the first and second ends of the bottom member.

3. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 2, wherein the means for aligning comprise:

a plurality of spaced projections extending upwardly from the bottom member within the alignment zone.

4. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 3, wherein the plurality of projections comprise:

at least one linear array of spaced projections extending upwardly from the bottom member to define two or more passages each of which is co-extensive with a single channel of the plurality of channels.

5. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 4, wherein the plurality of projections further comprise:

at least one projection extending upwardly from the bottom member, the at least one projection being spaced apart from the linear array of projections and within one of the two or more passages defined by the linear array of projections.

6. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 4, wherein the projections are individually or collectively removable.

7. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 3, wherein each of the plurality of spaced projections is substantially cylindrical.

8. (withdrawn) The feeder chute according to claim 1, wherein each of the plurality of channels further comprises a slot extending at least partially the length of each channel.

9. (withdrawn) The feeder chute according to claim 8, wherein the slot of each channel extends to a position which is about 10 centimeters from the discharge plane thereof.

10. (original) The feeder chute according to claim 1, wherein the distance between the discharge plane of adjacent channels is substantially the same as the distance between troughs of adjacent channels.

11. (withdrawn) A feeder chute and a conveyor system in combination, the feeder chute comprising:

a bottom member having a first end which defines a receiving zone and a second end which defines a discharge zone, and

a plurality of channels formed in said bottom member within the discharge zone and extending in the direction between the first and second ends; and the conveyor system comprising:

a plurality of conveyors, each conveyor being aligned beneath one of the plurality of channels of the feeder chute, and each conveyor including a drive wheel operatively coupled to a drive shaft, one or more driven wheels, and a conveyor belt suspended on the drive wheel and the one or more driven wheels, and

drive means, coupled to the drive shaft of each conveyor, for driving revolution of each of the plurality of conveyors;

wherein one of said conveyors forms a terminus defining a first discharge plane and a second conveyor adjacent to said one conveyor forms a terminus defining a second discharge plane, the second discharge plane being spaced from said first discharge plane.

12. (withdrawn) The feeder chute and conveyor system according to claim 11, wherein the drive means comprises and a motor operatively coupled to the drive shaft.

13. (withdrawn) The feeder chute and conveyor system according to claim 11, wherein drive shaft for each conveyor is a common drive shaft and the drive means is coupled to the common drive shaft.

14. (withdrawn) The feeder chute and conveyor system according to claim 11, wherein the conveyor belts for the plurality of conveyors all rotate at a constant linear velocity.

15. (withdrawn) The feeder chute and conveyor system according to claim 11, wherein the distance between the discharge plane of adjacent conveyors is substantially the same as the distance between troughs of adjacent channels.

16-31 (canceled)